



**Montana Fish,
Wildlife & Parks**

1420 E. 6th Ave.
Helena, MT 59620
Phone: 406-444-4038

Montana Outdoor Discovery Center Improvement Project Decision Notice

Proposed Action

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks proposed to develop additional facilities at Spring Meadow Lake State Park in Helena as part of the Montana Outdoor Discovery Center (Center). Proposed features described in detail in an environmental assessment include: a youth archery/air gun range, children's discovery area, vault latrine, group use shelter and a fishing/aquatic education dock. The alternative considered was not to develop these additional features.

Public Comment Process

The public was notified of the opportunity to review and comment on this EA through legal notices in the *Great Falls Tribune* and the *Helena Independent Record* and through a public notice on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page: <http://fwp.mt.gov>. An extensive front page news story in the June 29, *Helena Independent Record* also informed the public of FWP's plans, the EA and a scheduled public meeting. Copies of the environmental assessment were distributed to the neighboring landowners and interested parties to ensure their knowledge of the proposed project.

The public comment period ran from June 15, through July 16, 2010. A public meeting was held at the FWP headquarters office on June 30 from 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Public Comment

FWP received two written comments on the draft EA and one person attended the public meeting. All three individuals were supportive, generally, of the plans to enhance FWP's educational facilities.

One specific comment expressed concerns about the need for irrigation to assure success of re-vegetation efforts, citing high mortality of the trees replanted after the 2007 fire, and the need to restore habitat diversity following the soil remediation project in 2009. FWP is aware of the need for irrigation to assure success of re-vegetation, particularly for trees and shrubs. FWP will include irrigation as necessary in plans for re-vegetation. Re-establishing a variety of habitat types to the area and preventing invasive species spread will be priorities for FWP's restoration efforts at Spring Meadow Lake.

One comment suggested that there should be “no gun classes” at the center. Another comment raised concerns about the potential for conflict between the proposed youth archery/air gun range and bird watching and scientific education for children. In addition to these external comments, internal concerns were expressed by FWP staff regarding plans to include use of air guns at the youth range.

FWP considered eliminating the youth archery/air gun range from the list of proposed developments and/or not conducting any programs that involve firearms at the center. However, hunter education is an important and valued program offered by FWP and required by law for youth to obtain a hunting license. Proper, safe and respectful use of firearms is an essential part of the hunter education curriculum. FWP’s anticipated use of the facilities at the center for hunter education classes, including instruction on the use of firearms, established the basis for using significant federal aid funding to complete the restoration of the Stedman Building. Accordingly, FWP will proceed with educational programs that include hunter education and firearms safety at the center.

With respect to shooting of arrows and air guns, FWP determined that limiting weapons at the youth range to archery only will reduce impacts, minimize the potential for conflict and preclude the risk of even minor soil contamination from lead projectiles. To further address concerns about potential conflict between archery and other activities at Spring Meadow Lake State Park, use of the range will be restricted more than described in the draft Environmental Assessment. Use of the archery range will be limited to shooting under the direct supervision of an FWP-approved archery instructor. The proposed range is small, located adjacent to roadways with little wildlife habitat, and should not have any impact on other activities, including bird watching.

Decision

Based on the analysis in the Environmental Assessment (EA) and applicable laws, regulations and policies, I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the natural or human environment. Therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

It is my decision to approve the proposed action with the following modifications:

1. The proposed youth archery/air gun range will be limited to youth archery equipment only. No air guns, or other firearms will be permitted.
2. Use of the range will be limited to groups or individuals under the direct supervision and control of an FWP-approved archery instructor.

MFWP will proceed with the remainder of the project as proposed, as funding becomes available. By this decision notice, the draft EA is hereby made the final EA with the above described modifications. The final EA may be viewed or obtained from Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, 1420 E. 6th Ave, Helena, MT 59620.

Appeals

In accordance with FWP policy, an appeal may be made by any person who has either commented in writing to the department on the proposed project, or who has registered or commented orally at a public meeting held by the department on the proposed project, or who can provide new evidence that

would otherwise change the proposed plan. An appeal must be submitted to the Director of FWP in writing and must be postmarked or received within 30 days of this decision notice. The appeal must describe the basis for the appeal, how the appellant has previously commented to the department or participated in the decision-making process, and how the department can provide relief. The appeal should be mailed to: Director, Fish, Wildlife & Parks, 1420 East 6th Avenue, Helena, MT 59620.

Ron Aasheim, Chief

Date

Please direct requests and questions to:

Ron Aasheim, Chief
Communications and Education Bureau
Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks
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Helena, MT 59620